



2023 Heatstroke — Hot Cars Kill Kids FACT SHEET

Since 1998, when safety advocates first began tracking, pediatric vehicular heatstroke has killed more than 940 children. Each death was preventable. The U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) is working with **[Local Organization]** to reach out to parents and caregivers with critical information about the dangers of heatstroke. NHTSA, safety advocates, and academic institutions urge parents and caregivers to learn about the deadly consequences of leaving children in hot cars. For the latest heatstroke data, visit www.noheatstroke.org.

Heatstroke is the leading cause of non-traffic, non-crash-related fatalities for children 14 and younger:

- April 2023 marked 25 years that pediatric vehicular heatstroke deaths have been tracked. By the end of 2022, alone, 33 children died due to vehicular heatstroke. The death rate has been lower in recent years, which is likely due to more families being at home and routines drastically changed.
- On average, 38 children die per year due to vehicular heatstroke. The biggest risk factor in these cases is a change in routine.
- The three main scenarios in which heatstroke occurs are:
 1. Children are forgotten in vehicles by parents or caregivers
 2. Children gain access to unlocked vehicles and become trapped inside
 3. Children are knowingly left in vehicles by parents or caregivers

How this happens:

- Most vehicular heatstroke deaths occur when a child is forgotten by a parent or caregiver and left in a hot car. The "forgotten" circumstance accounts for more than half of the total child heatstroke deaths that have occurred since 1998. In approximately half of these "forgotten" deaths, specifically, the child was on their way to childcare or preschool. A busy parent or caregiver may unintentionally forget that a rear-facing quiet or sleeping child is in the back of the vehicle. This most often occurs with children under one year of age. Always remember to look before you lock. You could save a life.
- Toddlers and young children are also at risk, as they can gain access into a vehicle without supervision. Some children gain access into a vehicle without the knowledge of an adult and may be unable to get out of the car, especially if child locks are



activated. It is essential to teach children that it is dangerous to play in or around the car. Parents should get into the habit of storing keys and fobs out of a child's reach.

- Sometimes, children are left intentionally by parents who do not understand the dangers of a hot vehicle, or who may not understand how quickly a vehicle can heat up to dangerous temperatures. It cannot be overstated: Never leave your child in a vehicle alone, not even for a minute.
- The day of the week may have an influence on children who have been forgotten in a vehicle, or who have gained access: "Forgotten" deaths are most likely to occur on Thursdays and Fridays, while "gained access" deaths typically occur on weekends, with Sunday being the most at-risk day.
- Approximately 58% of heatstroke deaths occur when the child is at home, followed by 23% of deaths occurring at a parent or caregiver's work.
- By the end of 2022, Texas and Florida had the highest number of child heatstroke deaths. Additional states at highest risk for heatstroke deaths per capita are Louisiana, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, and Arizona.

High body temperature can cause permanent injury or even death:

- Heatstroke begins when the core body temperature reaches approximately 104 degrees and the thermoregulatory system is overwhelmed. A core temperature of approximately 107 degrees is lethal.
- Children are at a higher risk than adults of dying from heatstroke in a hot vehicle because their body temperature rises three to five times faster than an adult's.
- The children most at-risk for heatstroke are those under 1 year, yet they make up 31% of heatstroke deaths.
- In 10 minutes, a car can heat up by as much as 20 degrees. Rolling down a window does little to keep a vehicle cool.
- Heatstroke fatalities have occurred even in vehicles parked in shaded areas and when the outside air temperatures were 80 degrees Fahrenheit or less.
- Summertime is the peak season for these tragic incidents, but heatstroke can occur in outdoor temperatures as low as 57 degrees. The warning signs of heatstroke vary, but may include:
 - Red, hot, and moist or dry skin
 - Absent sweating, even though the child is warm
 - Strong rapid pulse or a slow weak pulse
 - Throbbing headache
 - Dizziness
 - Nausea
 - Confusion



- Grouchiness or strange behavior
- The children most at-risk are those under 1 year, making up 31% of heatstroke deaths.

Remember these three things:

- NEVER leave a child in a vehicle unattended.
- Make it a habit to look in the back seat EVERY time you exit the car.
- ALWAYS lock the car and put the keys out of reach.

Additional Resources:

For current data and resources on vehicular heatstroke, visit the following websites:

- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration - www.nhtsa.gov/heatstroke
- San Jose State University, Department of Meteorology & Climate Science - www.noheatstroke.org
- Safe Kids Worldwide - www.safekids.org
- National Safety Council - www.nsc.org
- Children's Hospital of Philadelphia - www.chop.edu

For more information, visit www.trafficsafetymarketing.gov/get-materials/child-safety/heatstroke-prevention.